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cc: jsl
Reply-to: (J. Lederberg)jls@rockvax.rockefeller.edu
Subject: report on Berlyn DIR-9019995

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Hoping the government is running again, for you to get this.

This project is primarily in support of the E. coli Genetic Stock Center. The latter is a most precious resource, well-nigh indispensable to the bacterial genetics community. Its cheerful and efficient management at Barbara Bachmann's hands has for years been one of the most constructive, cohesive aspects of scientific collaboration.

There is also no doubt of the need to codify and modernize the data that Barbara has collected over the years, and eventually to standardize the stock center activities so they can survive B.B.'s eventual retirement.

The approach, procedures, and prior work applied to this effort appear to me entirely reasonable. I have not had occasion to be a formal user of the database (though have frequently deposited and occasionally extracted strains and information, starting with the aboriginal K-12, from the collection.) It is a little difficult for me to be sure that it has all the necessary ingredients, and look-and-feel, that would be optimal for the community. The investigators seem to be fully competent, and they have the advice of a like advisory board; so I have no reason to be anxious on this point.

Most blatantly lacking is any clear testimonial from Dr. Bachmann about how she herself is relating to this project. I had called her a few months ago, to offer some assistance in collecting bibliographic information; and she mentioned how abjectly computer-naïve she was, and that she was depending on Berlyn -- but all that seemed rather vague. Nor is there any direct mention of the issues of retrieval, icw efforts to maximize the completeness of data sources; an incomplete reference (lacking title and other biblio. details -- these being importantly included in the printed versions in Microbiological Reviews) is all that is footnoted in the sample responses to queries included in the application. So it is possible that the project structure is not giving BB much support in that centrally important part of the task.

More to be sure that this support is made forthcoming than any black mark on approval, I hope you will clear up these and other elements of the relationship with BB. Perhaps they are integral with the main Stock Center Grant, and there is no other reason why they are not highlighted here.

On the whole, I would be heartily supportive of this effort, and believe it should be funded with high priority.


Joshua Lederberg